

I. DESCRIPTION OF FORT FISHER STATE RECREATION AREA

LOCATION AND ACCESS

Fort Fisher State Recreation Area is located in New Hanover County five miles south of Carolina Beach. From Interstate 40, take College Road (NC 132) south through Wilmington to U.S. 421. Take U.S. 421 south through Carolina Beach and Kure Beach. Fort Fisher State Historic Site is located on the west side of the highway just south of Kure Beach. Fort Fisher State Recreation Area is further south of the historic site. Turn east on Loggerhead Road to enter the state recreation area. Parking and the visitor's center are on the left.

Fort Fisher State Recreation Area may also be reached from Brunswick County via the Southport-Fort Fisher ferry, which crosses the Cape Fear River. This thirty-minute ferry ride takes you to the end of Federal Point. Take U.S. 421 north for about one mile. Fort Fisher State Recreation Area is on the east side of the highway, accessible via Loggerhead Road. (Figure I-1)



The park's mailing address, telephone number and email address are:

Fort Fisher State Recreation Area
1000 Loggerhead Road
Kure Beach, N.C. 28449-0243

(910) 458-5798

fort.fisher@ncmail.net

Figure I-1. Location Map for Fort Fisher State Recreation Area

PARK LAND

Fort Fisher State Recreation Area consists of 287 acres that lie along the ocean beach south of the Fort Fisher State Historic Site. (Figure I-2) The major attraction is more than seven miles of ocean beach, one of the few remaining undeveloped stretches of shoreline on North Carolina's southern coast.

The area includes a great variety of maritime habitats. The ocean teems with life, from microscopic plankton to large sport fish. Sandbars and intertidal pools found in the narrow zone between land and sea provide a diverse and productive arena for living creatures. A remnant maritime forest of live oak and yaupon occupies the northern portion of the recreation area. Near the ocean, these salt-tolerant trees are shaped by wind and sea spray and grow no more than 20 to 30 feet in height. Farther south, an evergreen shrub thicket composed of yaupon, wax myrtle, groundsel tree and greenbrier runs along the main road. Salt marsh habitats, among the most productive habitats on earth, supply vital nutrients to life in nearby creeks, bays and ocean waters.

Life abounds along the beach, salt marsh, tidal creek and mudflat communities. Bare sand and sparsely vegetated areas between and behind dune areas serve as nesting habitats for solitary and colonial water birds, particularly piping plovers (threatened – federal), Wilson's plovers (significantly rare – state), gull-billed terns (threatened – state), black skimmers (special concern – state), and least terns (special concern – state). Both loggerhead and green sea turtles (threatened – federal) use the site's isolated beaches for nesting habitat during April through September to deposit as many as 120 eggs per nest in the warm sand. Dune bluecurls (significantly rare – state) is a mint that grows in small colonies on back dunes (NCNHP, 2004).

Land at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area constantly changes. Hurricanes and strong storms can erode dunes -- washing away in hours what took years to accumulate-- or open or close inlets. Grasses and other plants tolerant to the sand, wind and salt spray help to trap windblown sand and thus build and stabilize new dunes.

VISITOR FACILITIES

Fort Fisher State Recreation Area offers a variety of recreational opportunities. (Figure I-2) Visitors enjoy over seven miles of mostly uncrowded beach, swimming, walking, sunning, fishing, and playing in the sand. From the parking lot at the state recreation area, an elevated boardwalk leads over the dunes to the beach. The adjacent visitor's center includes the park office, nature exhibits, restrooms, and a refreshment stand that is open during the summer months. In addition to walking along the beach, visitors may enjoy meandering through the marsh on a trail that offers a glimpse into sound-side wildlife and habitats.

In the southern portions of the park, four-wheel-drive registered motor vehicles are allowed at certain times along the beach within a limited corridor. Drivers must follow designated routes, avoiding dunes, vegetation and marked nesting areas.

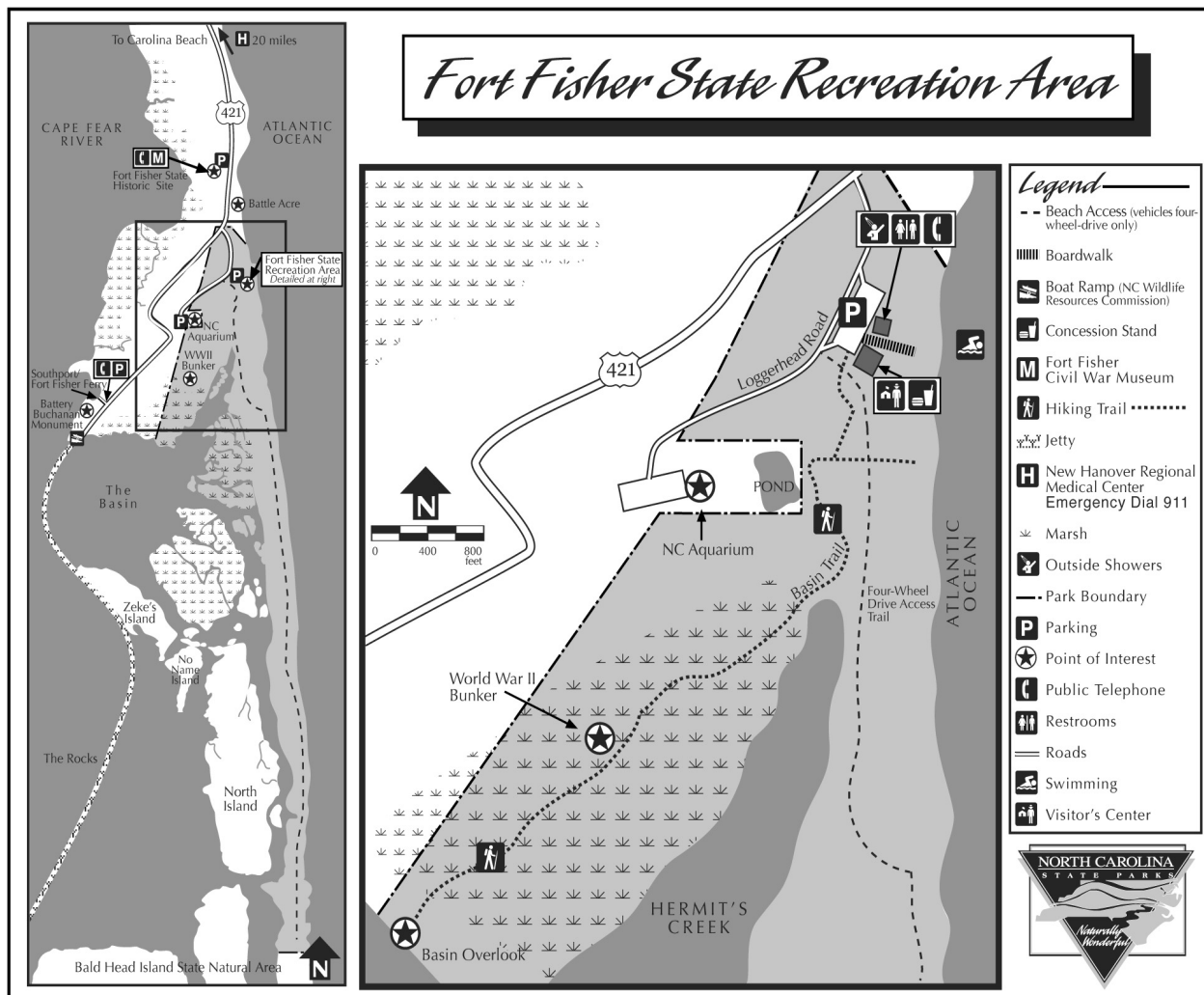


Figure I-2. Fort Fisher State Recreation Area

NEARBY STATE AREAS AND FACILITIES

Bald Head Island State Natural Area

The Bald Head Island State Natural Area consists of a complex of barrier islands, salt marshes, bays, tidal creeks and estuarine islands located south of the state recreation area. (Figure I-2) The state natural area, a unit of the N.C. State Parks System, is under administration of staff from Fort Fisher State Recreation Area and includes: all of Bluff Island; about five miles of the beach strand of East Beach and the marshes behind it; and land at the actual point of Cape Fear on the southeastern tip of Bald Head Island. The state natural area contains sand ridges with Dune Grass communities, Maritime Wet Grassland in the swales, Maritime Evergreen Forest, Interdune Pond community, Salt Marsh and Maritime Shrub communities.

Bald Head Island State Natural Area is part of a nationally significant biological complex. East Beach provides excellent nesting habitats for loggerhead and green sea turtles (threatened – federal)

and least terns (special concern – state) because it is one of the few beaches in southern North Carolina that is free of both vehicular traffic and lights associated with adjacent beach development.

Seabeach amaranth (threatened – federal) plants are succulent annuals that grow in foredune areas and inter-dune flats. Notable plants (i.e., significantly rare – state) found in back dune, shrub thicket and maritime forest communities of Bluff Island include tough bumelia, dune bluecurls, cabbage palmetto, moundlily yucca, four-angled sedge and sunrise lichen. At the south end of the property, Cape Fear contains additional listed species in the dynamic beach/dune complex located at the southeastern-most point of the state: loggerhead sea turtle (threatened – federal), Wilson’s plover (significantly rare – state), peregrine falcon (endangered – federal), common ground dove (significantly rare – state), coachwhip (significantly rare – state), seabeach amaranth (threatened – federal), seabeach knotweed (significantly rare – state) and beach morning-glory (significantly rare – state) (NCNHP, 2004).

Bald Head Woods Coastal Reserve

The 186-acre [Bald Head Woods](#), managed by the N.C. Division of Coastal Management with the Bald Head Island Conservancy as its local steward, is located in the central portion of Bald Head Island (Figure I-3). The N.C. Natural Heritage Program lists Bald Head Island as a priority site of national significance, and the U.S. Department of the Interior has registered the Smith Island Complex as a National Natural Landmark. One of the significant features of Bald Head Woods is the extremely old, large trees in this maritime forest. Live oak and laurel oak are the major species, making up a canopy that shelters the plants from salt spray. The thick undergrowth consists of wild olive, American holly, yaupon, and catbrier. The lack of light favors shade-tolerant plants like ebony spleenwort. Cabbage palmetto appears throughout the forest. Local wetlands provide habitat and breeding grounds for amphibians and reptiles such as the southern toad, squirrel tree frog, eastern mud turtle, and black racer. Gray squirrels, raccoons and opossums inhabit the forest, as do Carolina wrens, cardinals and painted buntings. Catbirds, towhees, blue jays and twenty-two species of warblers migrate through in the fall. Trails and interpretive signs wind through the reserve.

WRC Boating Access

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission operates a boating access area at Federal Point, about one mile south of the state recreation area on U.S. 421 (Figure I-2). Two boat ramps lead into a shallow bay named “The Basin” where narrow channels meander through mud flats, oyster beds and salt marsh grasses.

Carolina Beach State Park

[Carolina Beach State Park](#), located approximately five miles north of Fort Fisher, offers camping, hiking, picnicking, nature study and fishing. A marina and boat ramp within the park allow access to the Cape Fear River, Snow’s Cut, and sounds and the ocean. A visitor center houses exhibits about the area’s history and its natural resources.



Fort Fisher State Recreation Area

- Division of Parks & Recreation
- North Carolina Aquarium
- Dept. of Cultural Resources
- Division of Coastal Management
- Dept. of Transportation

2000 0 2000 4000 6000 Feet

0.5 0 0.5 1 Miles



Division of Parks and Recreation

Figure I-3.

Fort Fisher State Historic Site

The [Fort Fisher State Historic Site](#), located just north of the state recreation area, includes a visitor center, museum and historic trail that offer a look into the history of the Civil War era fort and lower Cape Fear Region. Adjacent to the historic site is an exhibit building operated by the Underwater Archaeology Section of the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources that features artifacts and maritime history. (Figure I-3)

N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher

The [N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher](#) is located on Loggerhead Road south of the state recreation area parking and visitor center. The newly remodeled and expanded aquarium offers indoor and outdoor exhibits, an auditorium and classrooms. Daily programs feature live animals, marine life videos and special activities. Programs are conducted both within the aquarium and outside. (Figure I-3)

Southport-Fort Fisher Ferry

The N.C. Department of Transportation toll ferry transports vehicles and passengers across the Cape Fear River between Fort Fisher and Southport. Crossing time is about 30 minutes. Each ferry holds 30 cars, and waiting lines often form during summer months. (Figure I-3)

N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve - Zeke's Island

The [Zeke's Island](#) component of the North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve, an 1160-acre area of outstanding estuarine and ocean resources with extensive marshes and tidal flats, is found to the west of the state recreation area. The reserve includes a portion of the long rock jetty called "The Rocks" and The Basin as well as Zeke's Island, No-Name, and North Island. The Division of Coastal Management manages the area for research, education and compatible recreation (Figure I-3).

HISTORY OF THE PARK AREA

Early Settlement of the Area

Prior to European settlement, the Cape Fear Indians, of the Siouan language group, lived in and around the lower Cape Fear peninsula, farming, fishing and hunting. Mainly occupying the land along the Cape Fear River and its tributaries, the small tribe grew hostile to early settlers who had not treated them well and, in 1715, participated in an uprising against European settlers in the area. Fighting reduced their numbers, and in 1725, the Cape Fear Indians were defeated by a military expedition lead by "King" Roger Moore, founder of Orton Plantation in Brunswick County, and the Indians left the area. Artifacts of the native culture, including pottery fragments, arrowheads and mounds of oyster shells, have been found in the area.

Early attempts at colonization in the area were unsuccessful, mainly due to conflicts with the Cape Fear Indians. Pirating, common in the area during colonial times, also contributed to the struggles of early settlers. In 1726, a permanent settlement, the Town of Brunswick, was established along the

lower Cape Fear in what is now Brunswick County. Brunswick, home to two royal governors, was an early political center and major pre-Revolutionary port. It declined in importance as Wilmington grew and the royal governor was relocated to New Bern in 1770. By 1776, when British redcoats landed, few people remained. Some reports indicate that much of Brunswick was burned at this time. The ruins and land at Brunswick became a part of Orton Plantation in 1842. In the late 1950s and 1960s, archaeological work was undertaken at Brunswick, and the area is now a state historic site. (N.C. Office of Archives and History, 2004)

About 1730, further upstream on the east side of the Cape Fear River, the port of Wilmington was settled and rapidly outgrew the Town of Brunswick. Wilmington became a bustling port, particularly important for its exports of naval stores – tar, pitch and turpentine products derived from the resin of the longleaf pine. These products, critical for building and maintaining sailing vessels of that period, were sometimes called “sticky gold”. (Sharpe, 1954) The English crown designated the newly settled Cape Fear River as one of five official ports of entry, and the port became an important area for commerce. Agricultural and timber products, naval stores, shipping and trade formed the basis of the area’s economy. To aid navigation to and from the port, North Carolina’s oldest lighthouse, “Old Baldy”, was built on Baldhead Island in 1817.

Sugarloaf, a 50-foot high relict sand dune near the bank of the Cape Fear River, is part of an east – west ridge of sand dunes formed thousands of years ago during the late Pleistocene epoch. (Sugarloaf is now a part of Carolina Beach State Park.) Gradually trees and grasses stabilized the dunes by holding the sands in place. The massive sand dunes reminded early settlers from Barbados of the mounds of sugar at their homeport, and the name “Sugarloaf” stuck. Sugarloaf appeared on navigational charts as early as 1738 and was an important landmark for river pilots.

Civil War

Sugarloaf was also of strategic significance during the Civil War when, as part of the Confederacy's defense of the Port of Wilmington, about 5,000 troops camped on or near Sugarloaf during the siege of Fort Fisher. Fort Fisher was built to protect Wilmington from Federal forces prior to the Civil War. Its capture on January 15, 1865 severed the supply line of the Confederacy and the Civil War ended soon thereafter. An engagement between Union and Confederate forces took place at Sugar Loaf, a former community at or near this site, following the fall of Fort Fisher. For more information on the history of Fort Fisher and its siege, refer to the [N.C. Office of Archives and History](#).

A comparison of Civil War era maps with those of today reveals some huge changes in the area that have occurred and are still occurring due to the dynamic nature of the coastal environment and the impact of man. In the 1860s, the area in the vicinity of the state historic site was part of an extensive fort that faced, on its southeast flank, a nearby inlet of sufficient size to be a major point of entry for ships heading upriver to Wilmington. This inlet has now closed, and sand deposition has produced a long strip of seashore, dunes and salt marsh where Confederate blockade-runners once slipped past Union warships. Because of erosion at the seashore, the ocean now covers a considerable portion of the original fort and the lighthouse. (DNER and DCR, 1974)

Continued Development of the Area

Twenty-five years after the Civil War, a pier at the base of Sugarloaf became a major area transportation link. Captain John Harper's new steamer "Wilmington" made regular stops here. The gleaming white vessel with three decks could hold 500 passengers. Some would debark and board a narrow gage, open car, steam-powered railway that followed Harper Avenue and provided easy access to the boardwalk and beach. Kure Beach was accessed by train as well, as roads to the beaches were sandy and bad. Other steamer passengers continued on to Southport. Carolina Beach, settled about 1885, was incorporated in 1925 (Powell, 1968). By the 1940s, roads had improved and automobiles had become the mode of transportation to Carolina and Kure beaches.

In the late 19th century, a long rock jetty called "The Rocks" was built west of Fort Fisher to aid navigation by stopping shoaling in the Cape Fear River. Completed in 1881, The Rocks closed the former New Inlet, once used by Confederate blockade-runners to avoid the U.S. Navy, and created a lagoon now called the "Basin". Today, The Rocks is part of the Zeke's Island component of the North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve, an 1160-acre area of outstanding estuarine and ocean resources with extensive marshes and tidal flats.

The southern tip of New Hanover County became an island (now known as Pleasure Island) in 1929 when the US Army Corps of Engineers dredged Federal Point Cut, a canal that connects the Cape Fear River to Masonboro Sound. Renamed Snow's Cut in 1930 for Major William A. Snow, Chief Engineer for the Wilmington District, the canal is part of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. The waterway, an inland passage for boats along the Atlantic coast, was built to bring ocean traffic inland, away from North Carolina's dangerous coastline.

In the 1920s, New Hanover County removed the marl outcrop and used it for road construction, resulting in accelerated beach erosion east of Fort Fisher. In the early 1970s, a stone revetment was constructed in an attempt to slow the erosion.

In the early 1930s, local citizens of New Hanover County began a movement to preserve the site of Fort Fisher as a state or national park. The movement had little success and, by the onset of World War II, when the fort site became used as an active military post, died completely. (DNER and DCR, 1974)

World War II

World War II caused huge economic and social changes in the Wilmington area as industrial development and shipyards boomed. Civilian workers and military personnel poured into the area during the war years, causing Wilmington's population to quadruple. A huge, rapidly constructed shipyard began mass-producing the well-known Liberty Ships (Wilmington Today, 2004), armed cargo ships that transported all types of war supplies so important to the allied war effort.

In late 1940, construction started on Camp Davis, located about 30 miles above Wilmington. The base quickly grew, and by August of 1941 had over 20,000 personnel. Camp Davis used five remote training sites along North Carolina's southern coast for anti-aircraft gunnery and automatic weapons training. Fort Fisher became the primary firing range.

Facilities needed to make Fort Fisher a self-contained post were constructed. Almost 50 frame buildings, tent frames, showers and sanitary facilities, 80-seat cafeteria, mess halls, warehouses, post exchange, theatre, infirmary, guardhouse, motor pool, observation towers and other facilities were

constructed, covering an area of several hundred acres and surrounding the old fort. Along the beach, firing installations were erected. A large airstrip was also built, altering the existing land and fort, as national defense took priority over historic preservation. Training took place six days a week and loud military activity once again filled the air. The range stayed open until 1944, training many military personnel and aiding the war effort.

Recreational activities and sports were also a part of the base operations and important in boosting morale. The post theatre produced plays and musical variety shows, using mostly soldiers. Professional United Services Organization (USO) performances were an added treat. Wilmington and the New Hanover County beaches became favorite places to visit for soldiers on liberty. Many soldiers had never seen a beach or tried to live at one, so swimming lessons and beach safety were taught.

Camp Davis and its ranges including Fort Fisher closed in October 1944, prior to the end of World War II in 1945. (N.C. Office of Archives and History) The army abandoned Fort Fisher after the war. The landing strip had destroyed part of the fort area, and sea erosion had also taken its toll on the fort and beach, leaving little of the massive earthworks of the fort remaining. (DNER and DCR, 1974)

Fort Fisher Hermit

Robert Harrill, who came to be known as the Fort Fisher Hermit, moved to Fort Fisher in 1955 where he lived until his death in the summer of 1972. He became a celebrity and philosopher of sorts, becoming known to thousands of visitors that came to Fort Fisher during those years.

Harrill, who had been a husband and father and who had worked unsuccessfully at a number of jobs, at one time was committed to a state mental hospital. After working and studying to find himself, he decided to start over at Fort Fisher. No doubt somewhat dysfunctional, Harrill gave up comforts of modern society to live in an abandoned World War II bunker and live a simple but hard life with his dogs. Although his living quarters were rather squalid, he was surrounded and comforted by the beauty of nature. He relied on nature for much of his food, eating oysters, clams and fish as well as what he would grow. Over time, as his popularity and reputation grew, he also benefited from donations left by his many visitors.

He became more than willing to share his philosophy or opinions on a variety of subjects, particularly the value of getting back to nature and using common sense. Harrill is buried in Carolina Beach at the Methodist (Federal Point) Cemetery off Dow Road. Perhaps regarded post-mortem as even more of a philosopher, Harrill's life is remembered and celebrated by The Fort Fisher Hermit Society and a book that has been written about his life.

Restoration of Fort Fisher

Local and state interest in restoring Fort Fisher revived in the late 1950s. In 1960, the state purchased a 15-acre tract at the Fort Site, and in the summer of 1960, work commenced on a 187-acre tract leased to the state for a historic site by the federal government. Six mounds and seven gun emplacements were cleared of underbrush and seeded and marked with interpretive signs. A pavilion, constructed in the fall of 1961, housed museum displays. Several years later, a visitor

center/ museum to handle larger groups was built using funds appropriated by the 1961 General Assembly, and it exhibited an extensive collection of Civil War relics and contained a scale model of the fort (DENR and DCR, 1974). The state historic site focused on the preservation of the fort and on interpreting its history so that it might be appreciated.

In 1969, the state applied for and received approval from the US Department of the Interior for a federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) project to fund 50 percent of the cost to acquire additional land at Fort Fisher. Several amendments and time extensions to the grant were requested due to the necessity of condemning the property to prevent its commercial development (US Department of the Interior, 37-00147). Condemnation proceedings were undertaken in June of 1968 and the state took title to the 268.58 acres being condemned as of that date, but the proceedings were not resolved until a final judgment was rendered in February 1975 (State of North Carolina vs. James E. Johnson, 1975). LWCF assistance helped fund the acquisition of 187.17 of the 268.58 acres acquired by the condemnation (US Department of the Interior, 37-00147). Land in the beach area became increasingly developed and expensive as the area's popularity for second home development and as a vacation destination grew.

Beach erosion continued as a major problem at Fort Fisher. A study of beach erosion by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the early 1970s found that the beach at the historic site had eroded at a rate of about 11.3 feet annually since 1865. The erosion had destroyed a large portion of the original earthen mound fortifications and threatened the remaining fort.

Administration of the Fort Area

By 1974, Fort Fisher became the most heavily visited North Carolina state historic site. Although developed and managed as a historic site, most visitors were visiting in order to use the beach and surrounding areas for outdoor recreation. The Division of Archives and History lacked the expertise and staff needed to handle these visitors and manage approximately 474 acres. Recreational use of the area was principally for swimming and other beach activities such as fishing, picnicking, walking, and sunning. It also received camping and motorized off road vehicle use. Trails were cut across dunes and marsh, destroying dunes and negatively impacting the area's natural resources. Law enforcement and public safety, and litter and garbage collection became problems. (DNER and DCR, 1974)

Development and administration of the area was hindered and complicated by being under the jurisdiction of several governmental agencies with different purposes. The North Carolina Department of Transportation in 1965 established a ferry dock nearby on eight acres along the Cape Fear River for the Fort Fisher – Southport ferry. (Gaskill, 2004) In the summer of 1974, the Wildlife Resources Commission built a small parking area and boat launching facility on 4.7 acres that provided access to the The Basin. Planning was underway for a state aquarium, and that facility was completed in 1976 and quickly became a popular attraction. The Department of Cultural Resources managed the Fort Fisher State Historic Site, which consisted of both state-owned land and land leased from the federal government. Part of the safety zone for the U.S. Army's Military Ocean Terminal at Sunny Point, an ammunition depot, extended into the state historic site area and was leased by the state for 25 years starting in 1962.

In August of 1973, Secretary Grace Rohrer of the Department of Cultural Resources (DCR),

concerned over the problems created by uncontrolled recreational use of the Fort Fisher area, called a meeting with other involved state agencies. Two decisions were made: that the DCR would have management responsibility over the areas; and that the DCR and Department of Natural and Economic Resources would write a master plan to determine the area's needs and steps to manage it.

The *Fort Fisher State Historic Site Master Development Plan* was completed in 1974. It recapped the problems facing the area, assessed the site's natural resources, and recommended development priorities. The plan also made recommendations for the area's recreation needs and environmental education that would compliment the historical program (DNER and DCR, 1974).

Subsequent to the publication of the 1974 master plan, the DCR continued to manage the state historic site and the surrounding lands. The Division of Parks and Recreation gave some limited assistance with outdoor recreation use of the beach area using staff from Carolina Beach State Park (Huband, 2005), but the park staffing additions envisioned in the master plan for help at Fort Fisher went unfunded.

Unauthorized and unrestricted use of the area by off road vehicles continued to contribute to the steady deterioration of the dune structure, natural vegetation, and beach. The natural erosion process appeared to be increasing, so in 1982, the state and New Hanover County cooperatively established formal access, designated beach access points, and opened a marled parking area to improve the situation and better control access. In 1983 a second LWCF grant was awarded and later used by the county to improve the beach access. The \$30,000 grant, matched by \$10,000 from the Division of Parks and Recreation and \$20,000 from the Division of Coastal Management, was used to build a ramp over the dunes to the beach and construct a changing/ restroom facility and deck (US Department of the Interior, 37-00769).

In 1982, Mr. Walter Davis of Texas donated to the state Zeke's Island, No-Name Island, North Island, a portion of the barrier spit, intertidal/subtidal areas encompassed by "The Basin" and a portion of the rock jetty called "The Rocks". Allocation of management responsibility was given to the Coastal Reserve Program of the Division of Coastal Management. The area was acquired and is managed for research, education and compatible recreation uses. In 1985, the divisions of Coastal Management and Parks and Recreation signed a memorandum of understanding that allows Parks and Recreation staff to assist with site management including patrols and resource protection (Taggart, 2004).

A multi-agency Fort Fisher Management Committee was established in June of 1983 to improve and coordinate the area's management for outdoor recreation. New Hanover County assisted DCR with management of the recreation area by contracting lifeguard services through the Town of Carolina Beach and assisting with trash pickup. Agencies published a Fort Fisher Outdoors pamphlet. In 1982 the Division of Parks and Recreation began assisting with ranger patrols and a concession stand operator, and by 1984 a full-time ranger was on board to oversee management. The county assisted with additional sheriff patrols of the area. The Committee considered long-term management of recreation at Fort Fisher and concluded that the Division of Parks and Recreation was the most logical management agency if additional operating funds could be secured. The Committee decided to meet with local government officials and area legislators in order to seek adequate funds to operate the recreation area (Fort Fisher Management Board, 1985).

Establishment of Fort Fisher State Recreation Area

Up until 1986, the Department of Cultural Resources continued to manage the property as a state historic site, although much of the public that visited used the area for outdoor recreation. Frustrated with attempting to manage an area for which it had no legislative mandate to operate and inadequate staffing to do so, Director Wes Davis of the Division of Parks and Recreation in 1985 recommended that management of the recreation area at Fort Fisher not continue unless additional support was forthcoming and land was transferred from the Department of Cultural Resources to the Division of Parks and Recreation. The Division subsequently explained its position and needs to local mayors and state legislators in a November 1985 meeting (William W. Davis, 1985).

Pursuant to an agreement made between the Department of Cultural Resources and the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development - (now the Department of Environment and Natural Resources or DENR) - 287 acres lying between the Fort Fisher State Historic Site and New Inlet were allocated to DENR on March 5, 1986, for Fort Fisher State Park (Rohrer, 1986). Staff were assigned from nearby Carolina Beach State Park to manage the new state park unit. This same 287-acre area continues to be managed today by the Division of Parks and Recreation as the Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, although today the recreation area has its own staffing and administrative offices.

In 1988, Fort Fisher State Recreation Area was used to film a movie titled *Weekend at Bernie's* (a.k.a. *Hot and Cold*). A temporary, two-story shell of a beach house with a pool was constructed for the filming. Use of the state recreation area for private commercial purposes was not without opposition. The Friends of State Parks opposed the filming for environmental reasons and because of worries over the use of park property for non-park purposes, as did some others. After the filming, the house and pool were removed and the site was restored.

A new office and visitor contact station, constructed in 1998, now serves visitors to the state recreation area. The building also houses restrooms and a concession stand that is open during the summer months. A boardwalk over the dunes to the beach is nearby.

In March of 2002, after two years of construction, the North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher reopened. Improved and enlarged, the new facility is a major regional attraction. The aquarium conducts both indoor and outdoor environmental education programs, some which use the property of the state recreation area. Today, the Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, Carolina Beach State Park, the historic site, the aquarium, the boating access, the ferry, the estuarine reserve and their resources combine to offer visitors unique and varied recreational and environmental education opportunities.

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